

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE
MANAGEMENT OF THE QUICK
RESPONSE FUND

SIGIR-09-011
JANUARY 29, 2009

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SIGIR

Special Inspector General for IRAQ Reconstruction

Summary of Report: SIGIR-09-011

Why SIGIR Did This Study

The Quick Response Fund program (QRF) was created by the Department of State (DoS) in 2007 to allow Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq to support initiatives that promote efforts by community-based leaders and organizations to improve their communities' access to public services, economic opportunities, employment, and education. The U.S. Embassy's Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) reviews and selects projects and either OPA or the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) carries them out. The USAID component of the QRF is the Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP).

For this report, SIGIR's objectives were to answer the following general questions: (1) Are appropriate management controls in place and properly implemented to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of QRF resources? (2) Have performance goals, metrics, and processes been developed and implemented to assess program performance and results? (3) How have program funds been allocated and expended?

What SIGIR Recommends

SIGIR makes three recommendations to OPA intended to improve program results assessments, QRF documentation, and training.

USAID generally agreed with the findings in this report but believes it is too early in the process to measure results. The U.S. Embassy-Iraq also agreed with the findings in the report. OPA provided technical comments that we included where appropriate.

January 29, 2009

OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE MANAGEMENT OF THE QUICK RESPONSE FUND

What SIGIR Found

OPA has developed a sound process for reviewing and selecting projects to be funded by the QRF program. However, improvements are needed in OPA's and USAID's processes for assessing whether their projects were successful and met their intended goals. OPA acknowledges that improvement is needed in assessing its project results. USAID collects a large amount of data on its projects but needs to improve its process for evaluating and documenting outcomes. USAID has relied on its contractor to assess project outcomes rather than conducting independent analyses. However, SIGIR's review of the contractor's analyses found little information on whether results were achieved, on unintended consequences, or on issues of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Without an effective follow-up system to determine how QRF funds have been used, projects funded under the programs are vulnerable to waste and fraud.

OPA received \$35 million for QRF activities, and USAID received \$100 million. OPA has largely finished its portion of the program, obligating \$34.99 million of its \$35 million. USAID hired a contractor to manage its part of the program and considers its \$100 million as fully obligated when it signed the contract. As of January 15, 2009, USAID reports that \$52.1 million in projects have been approved. Contractor programmed support costs are not included in this amount. These programmed support costs appear relatively high, amounting to approximately \$.45 for each \$1.00 in grants. The contractor also pays subcontractors an 8% fee to disburse the funds, bringing total programmed support costs to approximately \$.53 per \$1.00. In written comments on a draft of this report, USAID provided data that shows its support cost budget as of January 20, 2009, is about \$.61 for each \$1.00 in grants provided to recipients. SIGIR plans to review support costs later this year.

We noted some opportunities to improve program management in several other areas. These include the need to ensure that complete documentation is in project files, and a need for improved training in awarding and managing large IRAP projects.



SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR IRAQ RECONSTRUCTION

January 29, 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF STATE

U.S. AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

DIRECTOR, IRAQ TRANSITION ASSISTANCE OFFICE

DIRECTOR, U. S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

MISSION DIRECTOR-IRAQ, U.S. AGENCY FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SUBJECT: Opportunities to Improve Management of the Quick Response Fund (SIGIR-09-011)

This report is provided for your information and use. It discusses the results of our review of the Quick Response Fund (QRF). The objectives of this audit were to determine (1) if appropriate management controls are in place and properly implemented, (2) if performance goals, metrics, and processes have been developed and implemented to assess program performance and results, (3) if the desired program results have been met, and (4) the funding allocated and expended for the QRF program and Iraq Rapid Assistance Program. This review was conducted as SIGIR project 8018.

We considered comments from the Mission Director-Iraq, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Embassy- Iraq, when preparing the final report. The comments are addressed in the report, where applicable, and a copy is included in the Management Comments section of this report.

We appreciate the courtesies extended to the staff. For additional information on this report, please contact Nancee Needham, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audits, (240)-553-0581 ext. 3793 / Nancee.needham@iraq.centcom.mil, or Glenn Furbish, Principal Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audits, (703) 428-1058 / glenn.furbish@sigir.mil.

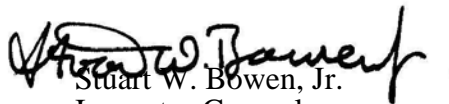

Stuart W. Bowen, Jr.
Inspector General

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Opportunities To Improve Management of the Quick Response Fund

SIGIR-09-011

January 29, 2009

Executive Summary

Introduction

In August 2007, the Department of State (DoS) created the Quick Response Fund (QRF) program to provide a flexible mechanism to enable Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) and embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (ePRTs), to facilitate Iraqi efforts to promote and accelerate economic and social development. In this report we refer to PRTs and ePRTs collectively as PRTs. The funds are provided through grants and/or direct purchases of materials—such as seed, fertilizer, or books—to local neighborhood and government officials or members of community-based organizations, including nonprofit organizations, business and professional associations, charitable organizations, and educational institutions.

In many respects QRF is the DoS counterpart to the Department of Defense Commander's Emergency Response Program, in that it makes funds available to quickly respond to immediately assist local organizations, associations and institutions. QRF is a DoS program with two components: a DoS component and a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) component:

- The U.S. Embassy's Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) manages the DoS component, which is called the Quick Response Fund. This report refers to the overall program as the **QRF program** and to the DoS component of the program as the **QRF-S program**.
- The USAID component is the **Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP)**.

A total of \$135 million in FY 2007 Supplemental Economic Support Funds (ESF) and \$30 million in USAID Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation program funds were allocated to support the QRF program; \$35 million was allocated to QRF-S and \$130 million was allocated to IRAP. The \$30 million in USAID Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation program funds is not included in this review.

OPA is responsible for the overall management of QRF program activities and the management of the two program components is divided based on the dollar value of the support provided. OPA's QRF-S program manages grants or funds for purchases under \$25,000. The USAID Mission-Iraq's IRAP program is responsible for all grants of \$25,000 to \$500,000, and has hired a contractor to manage its part of the program. The PRTs initiate all QRF-S and IRAP project proposals, but approval authority is divided. All grants must be approved by an OPA-managed Technical Evaluation Committee at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and by a Technical Evaluation Committee in Washington, D.C. Purchases under \$25,000 (known as micro-purchases) are made locally and can be approved by PRT Team Leaders. Procurements over \$25,000 (known as

direct procurements) must be approved by OPA. After OPA approval, the procurement request is forwarded to either the Joint Contracting Command-Iraq/Afghanistan or the U.S. Embassy-Baghdad General Services Office for contract award.

SIGIR initiated this review to assess the effectiveness and oversight of QRF program activities. The objectives of this audit were to answer these general questions:

- Are appropriate management controls in place and properly implemented to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of QRF resources?
- Have performance goals, metrics, and processes been developed and implemented to assess program performance and results?
- How have program funds been allocated and expended?

Results In Brief

OPA has developed a sound process for reviewing and selecting projects to be funded by the QRF-S and IRAP programs to ensure that projects support program goals. However, OPA and USAID both need to improve their processes and documentation for assessing the success of projects in meeting intended goals. OPA acknowledges that it needs to improve its assessments. USAID collects a large amount of data on its projects, but relies on its contractor to assess project outcomes—rather than conducting independent analyses. SIGIR’s review of the contractor’s analyses found little information on

- the achievements and results
- unintended program consequences
- issues of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

Without effective follow-up systems, projects funded under the QRF program are vulnerable to waste and fraud.

OPA received \$35 million for QRF activities, and USAID received \$100 million. OPA has largely finished its portion of the program, obligating \$34.99 million of its \$35 million as of September 30, 2008. USAID hired a contractor to manage its part of the program and considers its \$100 million as fully obligated when it signed the contract. As of January 15, 2009, USAID had approved \$52.1 million in IRAP projects. Contractor support costs are not included in this amount and appear relatively high—approximately \$.45 for each \$1.00 in grants awarded.¹ The contractor also pays subcontractors an 8% fee to disburse the funds, bringing total programmed support costs to approximately \$.53 for each \$1.00 in grants. In its written comments on a draft of this report, USAID provided data that shows that as of January 20, 2009, its support cost budget is estimated to be about \$.61 for each \$1.00 in grants provided to recipients. SIGIR plans to review support costs later this year.

¹ Based on USAID contract data from June 2008, when the grant management contract was definitized,

SIGIR noted opportunities to improve program management in several other areas, including the need to ensure that complete documentation is in project files, and a need for improved training in awarding and managing IRAP projects.

Recommendations

SIGIR recommends that the Director, Office of Provincial Affairs, direct that actions be taken to:

1. Develop an appropriate process for evaluating and monitoring QRF-S projects to determine their outcome.
2. Establish procedures to ensure that QRF project files include all required documentation, to include closeout documentation that identifies the results of the project. These procedures should include checks to validate the completeness of file documentation.
3. Modify QRF training to include PRTs' role and responsibilities for large grants and purchases managed by USAID.

Management Comments

The USAID Mission Director-Iraq provided comments, which are included in Appendix D to this report. USAID generally concurred with the findings of the draft report with some reservations. Foremost, USAID believes that it is too early in the grant process to measure progress. Nonetheless, USAID reported that its contractor would document the actual accomplishments of the grantees prior to close-out and that USAID would monitor this process. USAID also said that it has a monitoring and evaluation contractor that assists USAID in overseeing the grants contractor's performance.

Regarding the operational and support costs of the contract, USAID noted that \$62.3 million out of the \$100 million is available for grants. This amounts to a contract support cost of \$.61 for every \$1.00 in grants provided to Iraq recipients. SIGIR included this updated number in the report.

The U.S. Embassy-Iraq provided comments to our draft report which we included in Appendix D. The Embassy concurred with the recommendations in the report. OPA provided technical comments, which are included in the report where appropriate.

Introduction

In August 2007, the Department of State (DoS) created the Quick Response Fund program (QRF) to provide Provincial Reconstruction Teams and embedded Provincial Reconstruction Teams (hereafter referred to collectively as PRTs) with a flexible means to fund local projects that facilitate Iraqi efforts to promote accelerated economic and social development. Using grants and procurement authority, assistance is provided to local neighborhood and government officials or members of community-based organizations, including nonprofit organizations, business and professional associations, charitable organizations, and educational institutions. QRF is not designed to help individuals or for-profit businesses.

Procurement authority is used to acquire goods and services required by the U.S. government to support PRT projects.² Examples include seed, fertilizer, or books. Goods acquired by procurement may be transferred to other entities or nongovernment organizations or local governments. Grants transfer cash or goods to an entity to carry out an activity. The responsibility for the procurement of goods and services necessary to perform the activity is transferred to the grantee. QRF is in many respects the DoS counterpart to the Department of Defense Commander's Emergency Response Program, in that funds are made available quickly to respond to immediately assist local organizations, associations, and institutions to fulfill a need.³

Background

DoS initiated the QRF program to allow PRTs to support community-based leaders and organizations' efforts to improve access to public services, economic opportunities, employment, and education. DoS first requested funding for the QRF in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 Supplemental budget request for Economic Support Funds (ESF). The request stated that the funds "will support a new Quick Response Fund (QRF) modeled after the Department of Defense's successful Commander's Emergency Response Program. Provincial Reconstruction Teams use this flexible tool to quickly execute programs that will improve the local community."

Although QRF is a DoS program, it has two components: OPA manages one and USAID manages the other. OPA calls its component the QRF program, and it manages grants, micro-purchases, and direct purchases under \$25,000. Through the use of warranted contracting or grant officers, OPA also manages direct purchases of over \$25,000. In this report we refer to the overall program as QRF and the OPA component as QRF-S. USAID manages the Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP), which includes grants and purchases of \$25,000 to \$500,000. USAID-managed grants can range from \$25,000 to \$200,000 per recipient or up to \$500,000 for grants to a non-government Iraqi organization for non-construction projects. USAID uses a contractor, Development Alternatives, Inc (DAI), to manage, disburse, and monitor IRAP grants

² Procurements are divided into two groups; procurements under \$25 thousand (known as micro-procurements) and procurements over \$25 thousand (known as direct procurements).

³ The Commander's Emergency Response Program is a Department of Defense program used to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements by allowing military commanders to carry out programs and projects that immediately assist the Iraqi people and support the reconstruction of Iraq.

and purchases. The DAI contract is also being used to manage, disburse and monitor another USAID grant program, Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation.

The PRTs in Iraq initiate all QRF project proposals (both QRF-S and IRAP). However, approval authority varies depending on the type of funding to be used for a project and its' value. All grant proposals must be approved by an OPA-managed Technical Evaluation Committee located in the U.S. Embassy and by a Technical Evaluation Committee located in DoS' Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs in Washington, D.C. Purchase requests over \$25,000 are approved by OPA and passed on to either the Joint Contracting Command-Iraq/Afghanistan or the General Services Office at the U.S. Embassy for appropriate contracting action. Purchase requests under \$25,000 are executed locally and may be approved by PRT Team Leaders.

OPA has provided the PRTs with guidelines on the use of QRF. According to the guidelines, priorities for the program are:

- Supporting youth program projects that provide practical opportunities to prepare for a productive career and to make contributions to the improvement of their communities.
- Supporting local civil society networks and groups, municipal governments, and the business community to promote effective and transparent delivery of government services at the local level.
- Encouraging women's participation in the market-based economy and civil society.
- Promoting public accountability projects that include anticorruption and transparency components.
- Promoting the rule of law and legal reforms, including education on legal rights and property rights administration.
- Supporting specific projects for the environment or the promotion of public health.
- Fostering a market economy and the development of the private sector or public education on the workings of a market economy.

Examples of activities in the QRF program include supplies or services related to sanitation, food distribution, medical equipment and supplies; irrigation, civic cleanup; beautification programs; and other urgent humanitarian projects. Funds may not be used to purchase vehicles, support individual electoral campaigns, support political party activities, provide military or law enforcement assistance, or duplicate available government services.

Depending on the nature of a project and the funding mechanism used, funds may be disbursed in a lump sum or in periodic disbursements to recipients. The disbursements are made from an imprest fund maintained at each PRT.⁴ When the PRT disburses funds the PRT cashier (referred to as a sub-cashier) prepares and forwards a package of supporting documents to the Finance Management Office located in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The Finance Management Office

⁴ An imprest fund is a cash fund, usually of a fixed amount, established by an advance of funds from an agency finance or disbursing officer to a duly appointed cashier, for disbursement as needed from time to time in making payment in cash. PRTs under the QRF Program have imprest funds normally ranging in value from \$100,000 to \$300,000.

reviews and processes the documents and authorizes replenishment of the funds disbursed to the PRT sub-cashier in the form of a Treasury check. SIGIR did not examine the financial controls over the imprest funds as part of this review but plans to review these controls in the future.

DoS was initially provided with \$125 million for the QRF program through the Fiscal Year 2007 Supplemental Economic Support Fund Appropriation. DoS allocated \$25 million to OPA for QRF-S and \$100 million to USAID for the IRAP component of QRF. OPA subsequently received an additional \$10 million allocation to the QRF-S program bringing the QRF-S' total funding to \$35 million. USAID added \$30 million to fund Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation programs bringing the IRAP program total to \$130 million. However, USAID tracks the \$30 million separately. SIGIR did not review the \$30 million provided for Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation programs.

Soon after the QRF program started, the DoS' Bureau of Administration, Office of the Procurement Executive and the Bureau of Near East Affairs Iraq, with assistance from OPA, conducted an internal review of the QRF program. The purpose of the review was to proactively assess the program in the early stages of implementation to mitigate potential operational and management issues or problems in the future. The review included interviews with selected QRF stakeholders and users, user surveys distributed to PRTs, random examination of QRF transactions, QRF database analysis, and evaluation of QRF guidelines and forms. The review noted problems in several areas: slow replenishment of Treasury checks to reimburse PRTs for micro-procurements, differences in financial data from QRF database reports and financial reports from the DoS financial system known as Consolidated Overseas Accountability Support Tool, complicated and confusing QRF guidance and procedures, inadequate staffing of the QRF management team in Iraq, slow Regional Security Office vetting of potential recipients, inadequate training of PRT members on the QRF program, inadequate communication of changes in QRF to PRTs, problems with the USAID contractor, and lack of a performance management system to adequately measure and capture program results. DoS and the Embassy took corrective actions to address most of the issues raised in the review.

Objectives

SIGIR initiated this review to assess the effectiveness and oversight of QRF program activities. The objectives of this audit were to answer these general questions:

- Are appropriate management controls in place and properly implemented to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of QRF resources?
- Have performance goals, metrics, and processes been developed and implemented to assess program performance and results?
- How have program funds been allocated and expended?

Outcomes Are Not Properly Monitored

OPA has developed a process for reviewing and selecting QRF-S and IRAP projects to ensure that the projects meet established guidelines. However, OPA and USAID lack information needed to assess whether project outcomes met their intended goals. OPA does not have a follow up process. USAID relies on its contractor to track project outcomes rather than conduct independent analyses. SIGIR's review of the USAID contractor's analyses found little information on whether project results were achieved. Without effective follow-up systems, projects funded under the QRF-S and IRAP programs are vulnerable to waste and fraud. OPA acknowledges that improvement is needed in this area.

QRF-S Lacks a Monitoring Process

Although OPA has awarded grants and procurement funds for its QRF-S projects for over a year, it has not developed a formal process for following up on its grants and disbursements to determine if the funds, supplies, or equipment provided were used as intended or if the projects were effective. According to the QRF-S Program Manager, the program initially lacked sufficient staff to follow up on the projects, and awarding the grants and direct and micro-procurement funds was OPA's main priority. Around February and March 2008, or about six months into the operation of the program, the QRF-S management team conducted an internal review that helped to address its operational and management issues and adjust its processes to optimize program benefits. However, the review assessed program outcomes only through the use of surveys and interviews, rather than systematically using performance metrics. The report prepared by the review team identified the need to develop metrics that measure outcomes and program impact rather than just funds disbursed. In written comments on a draft of this report, DoS reported that it has since hired sufficient staff to oversee QRF program activities.

The lack of documented results is evident in OPA's database that tracks its QRF-S projects, proposal requests, approvals, funding and disbursements. One field in the database is a section for "Award Results." However, SIGIR found that for 92 of 100 micro-procurement projects we examined the awards results section was not completed or, when completed, contained limited information such as the status of payments or vague statements on project status such as "final payment in the amount of \$5,515 was issued on 6/15/2008; project completed; or "Second and final payment on this successful project," rather than an actual description of the award results.

OPA agreed with SIGIR's conclusion that the projects outcomes were not adequately monitored. However, OPA pointed out that the majority of the PRT-managed projects were less than \$25,000. According to OPA, the costs associated with monitoring small value projects with dedicated site visits supported by security escorts, may outweigh the benefits. As a result, OPA said that the PRTs would be encouraged to use local staff if available, to monitor projects.

USAID's Monitoring Process Lacks Overall Assessments

USAID has awarded grants and procurement funds for IRAP projects for over a year and has the rudiments of a process for following up on its projects in place. However, USAID did not fully

approve and implemented its performance monitoring process until December 2008. To its credit, USAID collects a large amount of data on its projects but needs to improve its process for evaluating and documenting results.

USAID identifies a process for monitoring and evaluating program performance in its Automated Directive System (ADS). The ADS identifies USAID's programming policy, which guides the way USAID designs programs to achieve development results, implements the programs, and assesses them. The ADS describes USAID's programming system as "designed to promote clarity in defining objectives and provide flexibility in selecting and implementing the activities to achieve them. The programming system includes three functions: planning, achieving, and assessing and learning, which are described as follows:

- **Planning:** The Agency's mission, value, and core values provide a framework that guides USAID's planning. This framework is shaped by learning from past experience and is described in USAID's Agency Strategic Plan. The plan also sets out an overall vision of what USAID wants to accomplish through a statement of its overarching agency goals and represents a broad consensus on a framework for action that directly affects its planning efforts.
- **Achieving:** Linking the planning and the assessing and learning functions are performance measures. USAID needs to know whether it is succeeding, and it determines this by establishing performance measures and performance targets before achievement takes place. USAID uses these measures to assess progress and outcomes.
- **Assessing and Learning:** In the assessing and learning phase, USAID defines how it assesses its progress on an ongoing basis, modifies activities when needed, makes changes to results based on experiences or other factors, and learns from its success or failure so as to improve its ability to succeed in future programs.

Early problems in monitoring QRF activities are partially attributable to delays in putting a performance monitoring and evaluation system in place. USAID required the contractor to develop a Performance Monitoring Plan that was to include indicators that were measurable and easily attainable from reliable sources and could be used to track quarterly and annual progress. This plan was to serve as USAID's basis for monitoring results. However, this plan was not approved until late December, 2008. The contractor had submitted a number of draft plans most recently in November 2008, but none had been approved. Contractor officials told us that the main reason for the delay in approving the plan is that the contractor is normally held responsible for meeting performance measures. However, for the IRAP program, the contractor is accountable not for achieving project goals but for the process indicators of efficient grant formulation, implementation, and support, and tracking an illustrative array of indicators, to provide snapshots of what the IRAP grants have accomplished. The contractor is also to help USAID ensure that the IRAP grants are linked to development documents such as the PRT work plans, the PRT/Brigade Combat Teams' Unified Common Plans, and the Provincial Development Strategies. According to a contractor official, USAID and the contractor finalized the performance monitoring plan in late December 2008.

While USAID was reviewing the monitoring plan, the contractor developed and used a performance monitoring system that tracked progress on all IRAP project activities and

deliverables, including progress toward achieving targets and results. According to the contractor's annual work plan (year 2), performance monitoring is conducted by Project Development Officers and Grant Managers. These personnel should conduct field visits to grant locations at least once during the life of each grant as security conditions permit. In addition, the contractor has subcontractors who should visit grant sites once per month, security permitting. Site visit reports should be written by the Project Development Officers and Grant Managers and submitted to USAID for review. The subcontract requires narrative reports and site reports with a minimum of five pictures. These reports are retained in the Technical Assistance Management Information System, which is the contractor's project management system. Grantees produce, in a checklist format, final reports that feed into the monitoring and evaluation plan. Final grantee reports are reviewed by Project and Grant Managers and are also stored in the information system.

SIGIR reviewed the documentation in the information system for four completed grant projects and found that while performance measures were identified, grantee reports contained little information on whether the performance measures had been achieved. The final grantee reports for the four projects contained brief statements that did not fully describe the success and impact of the particular project. For example:

- For a project to train internally displaced people to make carpets the description of the result was that the recipients feel as if there is someone who cares about their problems.
- For a project to present health information to mothers and children in remote areas, the result is described in terms of the number of people that attended the presentation.

SIGIR also reviewed several available weekly and quarterly reports provided by the contractor and found that the reports did not provide (1) insight into the results of the projects, (2) information on how successful the projects have been, or (3) information on the project's impact on the community. The reports present numbers and amounts of grants with updates on current projects and contractor activities during the period.

SIGIR's review also found no independent analysis of the grants by USAID personnel. While using a contractor to assist in grant management may be necessary, independent verification by USAID is a control measure that can protect USAID against fraud and waste. USAID's automated directive system also identifies a need for independent evaluation that focuses on why results are or are not being achieved, on unintended consequences, or on issues of interpretation, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, or sustainability.

In written comments on a draft of this report, USAID generally concurred with the finding in the report, but with reservations. Foremost, USAID said that it believes that it is too early in the program to measure progress. According to USAID, only a handful of grants have been closed out and IRAP is just reaching the stage where it can be determined whether grantees have reached their intended goals. However, SIGIR's review of USAID's QRF grant data as of January 26, 2009, identified over 100 grants where the funds have been fully allocated. SIGIR recognizes that there may be some delay between the allocation of funds and the completion of the grant activity. However, delays in completing close-out reports do not allow USAID management to adjust its processes and mechanisms as necessary to optimize the program

benefits. While USAID said that prior to close-out its contractor would document the actual accomplishments of the grantees and that USAID would monitor this process, we believe USAID needs to take steps to close-out the grants near the completion of the grant rather than near the completion of the contract in order to maximize the benefits of the grants.

Funding Allocated and Expended

Through the FY 2007 Supplemental Economic Support Fund Appropriation the QRF program received initial funding of \$125 million of which DoS allocated \$25 million to OPA and \$100 million to USAID. OPA subsequently received an additional \$7 million in May 2008 and \$3 million in August 2008, bringing OPA's total QRF-S funding to \$35 million and overall QRF program funding to \$135 million. OPA expects to receive an additional \$35 million for the QRF program from the FY 2008 Supplemental appropriation. USAID added \$30 million in Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation funds to its IRAP program bringing its total to \$130 million. However, USAID tracks this money separately and SIGIR did not include these funds in its review.

OPA obligates its portion of the QRF-S program funds upon approval of specific projects and as of September 30, 2008, had approved \$34.99 million for projects and disbursed \$17.5 million. USAID, on the other hand, obligated its total \$100 million IRAP funding in September 2007 upon awarding a contract to Development Alternative, Inc. (DAI) to monitor and disburse the IRAP grants and purchases. USAID reported that as of January 15, 2009, DAI had \$52.1 million in approved IRAP projects.

USAID's programmed contractor support costs appear relatively high—amounting to approximately \$.45 for each \$1.00 in grants awarded. USAID contract data from June 2008, when its grant management contract was definitized, shows that USAID expected to pay the contractor approximately \$34.5 million for operations and support costs, and a fixed fee of \$5.9 million. Thus, of the original \$130 million (\$100 million for IRAP and \$30 million for Civil Society and Conflict Mitigation), approximately \$89.6 million would be available for grants and subcontracts. This equates to a programmed support cost of \$.45 for each \$1.00 in grants awarded. The contractor also pays subcontractors an average of 8% of the dollar value of the grants to disburse grant funds to the Iraqi recipients. This brings the programmed support cost for these contracts to approximately \$.53 for each \$1.00 in grants. In written comments on a draft of this report, USAID provided data that shows that its budgeted support costs for the entire grant are now estimated to be approximately \$.61 per \$1.00 in grants disbursed as of January 20, 2009.

SIGIR's analysis of QRF data (including both QRF-S and IRAP) as of September 2008 shows that 55% of the dollar amount of QRF projects approved through September 2008 were for grants, 25% were for micro-procurements, and 20% were for direct procurements. All QRF projects are classified based on the major program or theme that they support. Table 2 shows the total amounts approved and disbursed by project as of September 30, 2008.

Table 2—QRF Project Funds Approved and Disbursed

| Project | Approved | Disbursed | % of Total Approved |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Economic Development | \$11,137,762 | \$5,003,388 | 15.95% |
| Education | 10,653,967 | 4,612,022 | 15.25% |
| Government Issues | 9,345,858 | 4,669,593 | 13.38% |
| Civil Society | 7,833,880 | 4,794,340 | 11.22% |
| Agriculture | 7,007,715 | 4,516,359 | 10.03% |
| Health | 6,466,507 | 2,380,066 | 9.26% |
| Business Development | 4,752,271 | 2,753,263 | 6.80% |
| Women's Program | 3,872,772 | 2,744,561 | 5.55% |
| Other | 3,212,154 | 212,420 | 4.60% |
| Youth Programs | 3,082,272 | 2,542,785 | 4.41% |
| Rule of Law | 2,476,127 | 1,509,452 | 3.55% |
| Total | \$69,841,285 | \$35,738,249 | 100.00% |

Source: QRF Periodic Report as of September 30, 2008.

Documentation and Training Need Improvement

DoS and the U.S. Embassy in Iraq worked together to develop initial management controls, guidance, training, and financial reporting procedures for the QRF funds and were proactive in identifying and correcting problems in the initial implementation phase of QRF. Although we recognize these efforts, we noted incomplete documentation in project files, and a need to train PRT personnel on the IRAP program.

Supporting Documentation Lacks Specificity

Required closeout documentation was not available in the QRF database for any of the 20 QRF projects that SIGIR selected for review. In addition, supporting documentation was not available for 5 of the 20 QRF projects we reviewed. As the official depository for QRF-related documents, the QRF database should include all information pertaining to each project from beginning to end. The supporting documentation that is required to be scanned and uploaded to the database for each project is

- a written proposal for the project
- team leader and other required approval documentation
- a budget for the project
- a description of how the project is in keeping with the overall goals of the team

- invoices or other supporting documentation for all purchases
- closeout documentation

According to the QRF operating procedures, the closeout documentation for disbursed funds should include the results of the project, any problems with the project, and how the project meets the overall goals of the team.

We reviewed 20 projects from the QRF database in August 2008 to determine whether all required closeout documentation was available. Our sample consisted of 15 randomly selected QRF projects with disbursements ranging from \$200 to \$23,600, plus the five largest projects. The five largest projects had disbursements ranging in value from \$150,245 to \$250,000.

None of the 20 projects we reviewed had the required information on the actual outcomes of the projects or information on how the project actually fit into the overall goals of the PRT. We did find that the documentation to support the approval and disbursement process was adequate; however, supporting documentation for 5 of the 20 projects did not completely follow the requirements identified in the Standard Operating Procedures for QRF. The following are examples of requirements that were not followed: (1) supporting documents were signed but not dated; (2) project descriptions did not include project goals or the expected impact on the community or organization; (3) a description of how each project fits in with the overall plans of goals of the PRT involved was not included; and (4) a description of the buy-in by local or Government of Iraq officials was not included.

Training Only Partially Provided

The DoS team in Washington, D.C. and OPA developed and implemented QRF training for PRT staff members prior to and during their assignments in Iraq. Interviews with PRT members and our review of training materials shows that both the DoS Washington QRF team and OPA have provided a comprehensive training program for the QRF-S personnel. Additionally, USAID provides training for its representatives on IRAP. However, military members of the PRT teams who do not attend this training sometimes have little understanding of the IRAP program.

The PRT staff comes from a diverse cross section of professions and backgrounds, and many of the PRT staff members do not have formal training in procurement activities, project management, or other management disciplines. Therefore, QRF training for PRTs is important to the success of the program and to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used appropriately. To address program training needs, DoS and OPA developed several QRF training programs for current and newly assigned PRT staff. For example, QRF training at the Foreign Service Institute's monthly PRT course includes a short presentation on USAID's IRAP program. This training is intended for PRT staff members prior to their deployment to Iraq to help prepare them for their QRF responsibilities. Additionally, OPA provides some QRF training to PRT staff during their in-processing at the U.S. Embassy Baghdad prior to departure to their PRT assignment. OPA also developed Power Point training presentations that are available online and provide the PRT staff a brief overview of areas pertinent to the QRF program. Finally, in July 2008, OPA began offering QRF training sessions to PRT members twice each month. However, some PRT members who are assigned by the military often do not attend this training.

The training provided, however, offers little information on IRAP and the USAID contractor's role in the program. With the exception of the short briefing on IRAP at the Foreign Service Institute, little other instruction is provided to the PRT teams about the larger USAID part of the QRF program. Discussions with contractor officials and PRT members show that some PRTs had difficulty understanding the role that the contractor played in the QRF program. Some PRTs appeared confused as to the functions the contractor performs and the services it can provide. For example, according to senior contractor official, some PRT teams would want to meet the local nationals working for his firm to establish a relationship and obtain some level of assurance of program cooperation. However, the officials said that his firm does not allow this interaction to ensure the safety of the local nationals as this could jeopardize their lives and families if they were seen entering and leaving a PRT location.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

OPA has developed a sound process for reviewing and selecting projects to be funded by the QRF program. However, OPA does not have a process for assessing whether QRF projects were successful and met their intended objectives, and USAID's process does not effectively evaluate and document outcomes. Effective follow-up systems are an important part of an agency's internal control processes to prevent waste and fraud.

OPA has largely finished its portion of the program, obligating \$34.99 million of its \$35 million for approved QRF-S projects. USAID has approved \$52.1 million in IRAP projects as of January 15, 2009, but this does not include the USAID contractor's support costs. These programmed support costs appear relatively high. For example, SIGIR's review found that in FY 2008 these costs were approximately \$.82 for each \$1.00 in grants awarded. However, USAID officials told us that contractor deployment costs tend to make costs high in the early stages of a program, and the costs come down as the program progresses. At this point, the final cost is unknown, however, in its written comments on a draft of this report USAID provided data that shows its budgeted support costs for the entire grant are estimated to be approximately \$.61 per \$1.00 in grants disbursed as of January 20, 2009. SIGIR plans to review USAID's support costs later this year.

We noted some opportunities to improve management of the QRF program. Required documentation in project files was incomplete, and training for the PRTs on the IRAP program could be improved.

Recommendations

SIGIR recommends that the Director, Office of Provincial Affairs, direct that actions be taken to:

1. Develop an appropriate process for evaluating and monitoring QRF-S projects to determine their outcome.

2. Establish procedures to ensure that QRF project files include all required documentation, to include closeout documentation that identifies the results of the project. These procedures should include checks to validate the completeness of file documentation.
3. Modify QRF training to include PRT's role and responsibilities for large grants and purchases managed by USAID.

Management Comments

The USAID Mission Director-Iraq provided comments, which are included in Appendix D to this report. USAID generally concurred with the findings of the draft report with some reservations. Foremost, USAID believes that it is too early in the grant process to measure progress. Nonetheless, USAID reported that its contractor would document the actual accomplishments of the grantees prior to close-out and that USAID would monitor this process. USAID also said that it has a monitoring and evaluation contractor that assists USAID in overseeing the grants contractor's performance.

In commenting on the operational and support costs of the contract, USAID noted that \$62.3 million out of the \$100 million is available for grants. This amounts to a contract support cost of \$.61 for every \$1.00 in grants provided to Iraq recipients. SIGIR included this updated number in the report.

The U.S. Embassy-Iraq provided comments to our draft report which we included in Appendix D. The Embassy concurred with the recommendations in the report. OPA provided technical comments, which are included in the report where appropriate.

Appendix A—Scope and Methodology

SIGIR initiated this audit in May 2008 (Project 8018) to ensure that OPA and USAID have effective management controls in place for the Quick Response Fund program to prevent fraud, waste, or abuse and to determine whether program goals are being met.

To identify reporting procedures for the financial, management and QRF program results we interviewed DoS and USAID staff and officials. We requested copies of written policies, guidance, and procedures regarding the financial and program management of the QRF program and IRAP. We also met with DoS and USAID officials and obtained additional data and supporting documentation from the IRAP implementing contractor.

To determine the adequacy of financial and program management controls and program results, we analyzed management data used to report approved and completed QRF projects, examined contractor invoices, and reviewed program training opportunities and written procedures and guidance. We also selected a sample of completed QRF projects to determine whether they met the parameters of the program. Additionally, we evaluated an internal DoS review of the QRF to assess the operations and management and ultimately the success of the program.

We performed this audit under the authority of Public Law 108-106, as amended, which also incorporates the duties and responsibilities of inspectors general under the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. We conducted this review between May and November 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Use of Computer-Processed Data

To perform this audit, we used data provided by U.S. agencies and USAID's contractor that was obtained from the QRF Tracking Database, the Consolidated Overseas Accountability Tool and the Technical Assistance Management Information System (TAMIS). We conducted limited tests of the data in the QRF Tracking Database and TAMIS to hard copy data available and matching electronic data and examined the reconciliation process of financial data in the QRF Tracking Database to financial data in COAST. We examined the general and application controls for QRF projects entered into the QRF Tracking Database as part of our overall evaluation of approval, disbursement, and documentation controls for the QRF program. While we found some instances of inadequate documentation in the QRF Tracking Database and reconciliation differences due to timing issues between the QRF Tracking Database and the Consolidated Overseas Accountability Tool, we found nothing material that would impact on our use of the computer-processed data for this audit.

Internal Controls

As part of the overall evaluation of the QRF program, we examined internal controls related to the QRF approval, disbursement, and imprest fund reimbursement process. We also conducted a limited evaluation of physical cash control procedures and examined internal controls as they relates to policies and procedures in place to ensure adequate financial and program management reporting.

Prior Coverage

There has been no prior audit coverage of the Quick Response Fund or the Iraq Rapid Assistance Program.

Appendix B—Acronyms

| Acronym | Description |
|---------|--|
| ADS | Automated Data System |
| DoS | Department of State |
| ESF | Economic Support Fund |
| IRAP | Iraq Rapid Assistance Program |
| OPA | U.S. Embassy Office of Provincial Affairs |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| QRF | Quick Response Fund |
| QRF-S | Quick Response Fund-State |
| SIGIR | Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

Appendix C—Audit Team Members

This report was prepared and the audit conducted under the direction of David R. Warren, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

The staff members who conducted the audit and contributed to the report include:

Walter J. Franzen

W. Randy Gentry

Nancee K. Needham

Frank W. Slayton

Appendix D—U.S. Agency for International Development Mission Iraq Comments



USAID | IRAQ
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

January 20, 2009

FROM: Christopher D. Crowley, Mission Director
TO: David R. Warren, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, SIGIR
SUBJECT: Comments on Draft SIGIR Report 09-011, Opportunities to Improve Management of the Quick Response Fund

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to comment on the January 5, 2009 draft copy of the subject audit. We appreciate the time and effort put in by the SIGIR team to come to a better understanding of the Quick Response Program (QRF) and its USAID-managed component, the Iraq Rapid Assistance Program (IRAP). While we note that there are no recommendations for action by USAID in regard to IRAP, USAID generally concurs, with reservations, on the findings of the draft report dealing with USAID. The following comments are provided for your consideration.

USAID Monitoring Process:

- **USAID processes for assessing whether projects are successful and meet their intended goals need improvement:** With only a handful of grants closed out, IRAP is just reaching the stage where it can be determined whether grantees have reached their intended goals. It appears that the four completed grant projects checked by SIGIR were not yet closed-out. DAI procedure is to write a close-out report, at which time details on the accomplishment of grant activities will be documented. DAI will document the actual accomplishments of the grantees prior to close-out. USAID will closely monitor this process.
- **USAID needs to improve its process for evaluating and documenting outcomes:** The results to be contained in final close-out reports should not be confused with "outcomes." True outcomes are usually not able to be known until well after activities are completed. To the extent that higher level results can be known, it should be noted that each grant should contribute to a portion of a PRT's work plan, which in turn is aimed at improving the rating of the province in the maturity model assessment that is performed quarterly. Ultimately, the PRT selects grant activities and evaluates the extent to which they supported the PRT work plan and assisted in the total effort to improve a province's rating in the maturity model.
- **USAID has relied on its contractor to assess project outcomes rather than conducting independent analyses:** DAI has a focused role within QRF and any assessment that USAID will conduct will cover those aspects over which DAI has manageable interest. USAID monitors IRAP through the USAID PRT Representatives and the CTO. In addition, USAID has a Monitoring and Evaluation contractor (IBTCI)

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available to provide independent monitoring and evaluation of USAID implementing partners and it is planned to make use of this instrument to further assess IRAP.

- **IRAP PMP approval process:** USAID approved the IRAP Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) on December 17, 2008. Previous versions had not been approved because USAID had determined that they could not be used as an effective program management document. As the draft report points out on page 7, DAI developed a system that tracked progress on all IRAP project activities. Valuable information was not lost as a result of the time used to refine the IRAP PMP.

Cost of IRAP Contract:

- USAID has fully obligated \$100 million of QRF into the IRAP contract.
- As of January 15, 2009, IRAP had committed \$52.1 million for 336 grants. With \$8.6 million reserved for meeting the Religious Minorities Earmark, there remains \$1.6 million to be programmed before the end of the contract.
- **IRAP Operational and Support Costs:** The IRAP contract budget has \$69.6 million in the line for QRF grants and subcontracts. Within this line, \$7.3 million is reserved for paying the other direct costs (and the associated DAI G&A) of the IRAP sub-contractors that implement much of the work in the field with grant recipients. This leaves \$62.3 million for QRF grants.

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Appendix D—U.S. Embassy-Iraq Comments



*Embassy of the United States of America
Baghdad, Iraq*

January 22, 2009

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
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TO: Assistant Inspector General for Audit – David R. Warren

THRU: The Acting Deputy Chief of Mission – Ambassador Robert Ford *RFord*

FROM: OPA Director – Phyllis M. Powers

Subject: Comments on SIGIR Draft Audit Report – SIGIR-09-011
“Opportunities to Improve Management of the
Quick Response Fund”

SIGIR recently completed a review of OPA’s Quick Response Fund (QRF) Program operations and submitted a draft report for OPA’s review and comments. This memorandum conveys OPA’s response to the following SIGIR recommendations:

1. Develop an appropriate process for evaluating and monitoring QRF-S projects (internal to QRF, non IRAP) to determine their outcome.
2. Establish procedures to ensure that QRF project files include all required documentation, to include closeout documentation that identifies the results of the project. These procedures should include checks to validate the completeness of file documentation.
3. Modify QRF training to include PRTs’ role and responsibilities for large grants and purchases managed by USAID.

RECOMMENDATION 1: We concur with this recommendation and will make the necessary changes to current procedures. The key component is oversight and follow-up action by OPA’s QRF Program Team members.

Additional controls will be introduced on Micro-Purchases (MPs), which are the high volume transaction type. The QRF Database will be programmed to include the capability for PRTs to electronically submit a Project Proposal Authorization (PPA) form (see Tab C). Submission of the PPA for QRF Program team review BEFORE the MP is executed will ensure that project

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information is captured up front and that the PRT is in compliance with QRF Program policies. OPA's QRF Program Team will not approve replenishment unless the "Award Results" field has been satisfactorily completed by the PRT (see Tab A).

In the case of Direct Procurements (DPs) and Grant projects executed through the QRF Program (not the IRAP program), the QRF Program Team will work closely and aggressively with the PRTs to ensure that the "Award Results" field has been satisfactorily completed by the PRT (see Tab B) which executed the project.

RECOMMENDATION 2: We concur with this recommendation and note that the key component is oversight and follow-up action by OPA's QRF Program Team members. With adequate staffing in place, we are confident that the necessary levels of oversight can be applied.

In October 2008, OPA worked with NEA to redesign the QRF Database to include inputs from PRTs of key project information. Using the information captured through these fields, we will regularly monitor and assess projects. OPA program finance staff will follow up with PRT personnel to ensure that all documentation is available in the QRF Database. Regular contact with PRTs, requests for monthly reporting, and project site visits will ensure that this oversight is effective and timely.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Although OPA is not completely clear about the intent of this recommendation, we agree in general with the need to provide training and guidance to PRTs on their roles and responsibilities in developing grants.

In fact, for high value grants executed by USAID contractor DAI, OPA's QRF training does now include a complete description of the roles and responsibilities of USAID and DAI in the QRF program. (DAI also gives a QRF presentation at FSI's PRT pre-deployment training class). We confirm that we will give this area greater emphasis in future training.

OTHER COMMENTS:

In addition to the direct responses made above, we include the following comments and observations:

1. OPA's QRF Program Finance team is presently staffed at six, with a seventh member scheduled to arrive in mid-March 2009. Full staffing will allow us to make site visits to each of the PRTs at least once every

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six months and conduct training updates, cash counts, examination of project files and other QRF Program related reviews.

2. OPA's review of the SIGIR draft report identified several comments and facts that were either superseded by more up to date information and/or incorrect. We discussed these instances with SIGIR representatives in Baghdad and provided an electronic copy of the draft report with our notations.
3. OPA agrees with the conclusion that QRF Program's project outcomes are not adequately monitored. However, the majority of the PRT managed projects are less than \$25,000. The costs associated with monitoring small value projects with dedicated site visits supported by RSO mandated security escorts, may outweigh the benefits. The PRTs will be encouraged to use local staff if available, to monitor projects.
4. We do not respond specifically to the findings and other information included in the section of your report entitled, "USAID's Monitoring Process Lacks Overall Assessments." Kent Larson will coordinate USAID's response directly with Nancy Needham, Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Audit-Iraq.

Attachments:

- Tab A: QRF Purchase – Project Paper Authorization Form
- Tab B: Screen Print of QRF Database – MP Submission Screen
- Tab C: Screen Print of QRF Database – DP and Grants Project Submission Screen

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